Tourism as Population and as Housing Stock

Tourist Population Equivalent and Tourist Housing Capacity in Barcelona, Catalonia and Major Global Cities

Draft 0.3 - English version

Central idea: to measure tourism not only as an annual flow of visitors, but also as an average human presence and as a physical accommodation capacity. The first dimension is demographic; the second is housing-based.

Abstract

This article proposes a dual measurement framework for tourism pressure on territory. The first dimension is demographic: it converts annual overnight stays into a magnitude comparable with resident population through the Tourist Population Equivalent (TPE).[1] The second dimension is housing-based: it measures how many units, dwellings, rooms or bed-places are structurally allocated to tourist accommodation.

The starting point is a common confusion in public debate: directly comparing annual tourists with residents. Annual tourists are a flow magnitude; residents are a stock magnitude. TPE transforms that flow into an average present population: **TPE = overnight stays / 365**. The analysis is completed with indicators of tourism capacity, tourist-use dwellings (TUD)[2] and tourist bed-places per dwelling.

Applied to recent data, Catalonia had around **98.6 million overnight stays** in tourist accommodation in 2025, equivalent to **270,137 average tourist persons**. The city of Barcelona recorded **37.8 million overnight stays** in tourist accommodation, equivalent to **103,590 persons**. The international comparison shows that Barcelona, Rome and Paris have relatively similar demographic tourism ratios, while London stands out in absolute magnitude and New York requires a cautious conversion because it mainly publishes hotel room nights.

Keywords: tourism; tourist population equivalent; tourist housing; accommodation capacity; Barcelona; Catalonia; touristification; effective population.

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[1] **Tourist Population Equivalent (TPE)** is used here as the average number of tourist persons present in a territory over a year: annual tourist overnight stays divided by 365. The operation has precedents in environmental tourism statistics, but the acronym is not treated here as a universally standardised global indicator.

[2] **Tourist-use dwelling (TUD)** is used in this paper as the English analytical equivalent of Spanish/Catalan categories such as *vivienda/habitatge de uso/ús turístico*. It refers to a registered dwelling unit used for tourist accommodation, not to an individual bed-place.

1. Introduction

Tourism is usually presented through annual visitor figures: millions of tourists, arrivals, trips or stays. Resident population, by contrast, is presented as a figure of people who habitually live in a territory. These two magnitudes are not directly comparable. One expresses a flow accumulated over a year; the other expresses a population stock.

When it is said that a city of 1.7 million inhabitants receives more than ten million tourists a year, the statement suggests intense pressure, but it does not answer the most important question for urban planning: how many tourists are simultaneously present on an average day. To answer that question, annual overnight stays must be transformed into an average daily population.

This article proposes organising tourism analysis through a two-dimensional matrix. The first entry is demographic: it measures the human presence of tourism. The second is housing-based: it measures the physical space oriented to tourist accommodation. A city may have a moderate average tourist presence but a strong housing pressure if a significant share of its residential stock or accommodation capacity is devoted to tourism. The reverse may also occur: a high TPE with a highly utilised capacity and little absorption margin.

The aim is not to replace conventional tourism statistics, but to translate them into units comparable with population and housing. Tourism can thereby enter the debate on the city, housing, infrastructures, water use, waste, transport and urban capacity without mixing annual flows with permanent populations.

2. Conceptual background: from overnight stays to equivalent population

The concept of tourist equivalent population does not start from zero. In Spanish environmental statistics it already appears as **Tourist Population Equivalent** or **Población Turística Equivalente**. In reports by the Spanish Ministry of the Environment it was defined as the sum of tourist overnight stays divided by 365 days. Its use was to translate annual tourism activity into an equivalent population that would have resided throughout the whole year in the territory.

> TPE = annual tourist overnight stays / 365

This precedent is important for two reasons. First, it shows that the mathematical operation is not new. Second, it locates the contribution of this paper elsewhere: not in inventing TPE, but in integrating it into a dual theory of tourism pressure, both demographic and housing-based.

The general idea of equivalent population also has a broader genealogy in environmental engineering and infrastructure planning, where services are sized for effective populations that may exceed registered resident population. In tourist territories, this difference between legal/de jure population and factual/de facto population is especially relevant.

Source: Spanish Ministry of the Environment, *Environmental Profile of Spain 2009*, indicator *Tourist Population Equivalent*.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Three units that must not be confused

The central distinction of the model is simple but decisive. In urban tourism, three different units are often mixed: accommodation units, bed-places and persons present.

Unit	What it measures	Example	Frequent error
Tourist dwelling or establishment	A physical or administrative accommodation unit.	A tourist apartment, a hotel, a guest house, a tourist flat.	Counting it as if it were a person or a bed.
Tourist bed-place / bed	Capacity to host one person.	A TUD with 5.5 average bed-places can host around 5 or 6 persons.	Confusing bed-places with dwellings.
Tourist Population Equivalent	Average tourist persons present according to overnight stays.	270,137 average tourists in Catalonia in 2025.	Confusing potential capacity with effective occupancy.

There is therefore no contradiction in saying that Catalonia has **105,399 tourist-use dwellings** and **580,073 bed-places** in those dwellings. A tourist dwelling is not equivalent to one bed-place: one dwelling contains several bed-places. In Catalonia, the average is **5.50 bed-places per tourist-use dwelling**; in the city of Barcelona, **5.82 bed-places per tourist-use dwelling**.

> average bed-places per TUD = bed-places in TUD / number of TUD
>
> Catalonia: 580,073 / 105,399 = 5.50 bed-places per TUD
>
> Barcelona: 61,875 / 10,632 = 5.82 bed-places per TUD

3.2. Demographic dimension: Tourist Population Equivalent

Let **T** be the annual number of tourists, and let **s** be the average length of stay in nights. Annual overnight stays **N** are the product of both elements:

> N = T x s

The Tourist Population Equivalent is defined as annual overnight stays divided by the days of the year:

> TPE = N / 365

Substituting **N** by **T x s** gives the decomposed formula:

> TPE = (T x s) / 365

Therefore, both formulations are equivalent:

TPE = N / 365 = (T x s) / 365

The aggregate formula is preferable when overnight stays are known, because it avoids rounding errors in the number of tourists and in the average stay. The decomposed formula is useful to explain intuitively why an annual flow of millions of tourists becomes a much smaller average stock of simultaneously present persons.

3.3. Derived demographic indicators

TPE acquires political and urban meaning when it is compared with resident population. Let **PR** be the resident population. The Tourism Presence Index (TPI)[3] measures what additional percentage of population average tourism represents:

TPI = TPE / PR

Mean effective population adds residents and equivalent tourists:

EP = PR + TPE

And the tourist share within effective population measures what part of all persons present are tourists:

theta_T = TPE / (PR + TPE)

The difference between **TPI** and **theta_T** is conceptual. **TPI** measures tourism as an increment over residents. **theta_T** measures the tourist share within the total persons present.

3.4. Housing dimension: tourism capacity and dwellings

The housing dimension does not measure how many tourists are present, but how much physical space or accommodation capacity is oriented to tourism. Two levels must be distinguished.

The first level is strictly residential. Let **V** be the total housing stock and **V_TUD** the number of tourist-use dwellings. The Housing Touristification Index (HTI)[4] is defined as:

HTI = V_TUD / V

The second level is total accommodation capacity. Tourism is not hosted only in tourist dwellings, but also in hotels, guest houses, hostels, campsites, tourist apartments, hostels and rural tourism establishments. We therefore define Total Tourism Capacity as the sum of bed-places by modality:

K_T = K_H + K_TUD + K_A + K_C + K_R + K_HOST + …

The relation between average occupancy and capacity is approximated by:

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[3] **Tourism Presence Index (TPI)** is an analytical acronym proposed in this paper for the ratio between Tourist Population Equivalent and resident population.

[4] **Housing Touristification Index (HTI)** is an analytical acronym proposed in this paper for the ratio between tourist-use dwellings and the total housing stock.

$$U_T = TPE / K_T = \text{Average Tourism Occupancy Percentage}$$

This ratio should not be confused with the official occupancy rate, because official occupancy is usually calculated on effectively offered bed-places, whereas this ratio compares TPE with the total registered or available stock according to the source.

4. Methodology and sources

The methodology consists in calculating two families of indicators for each territory. In the demographic dimension, annual overnight stays are used whenever available. In the housing dimension, tourist bed-places, tourist dwellings, rooms or registered units are used according to each city's statistics.

International comparison requires caution. Spanish and Italian statistics often publish bed-places or **posti letto**, comparable to person-capacity. Paris provides hotel nights and a register of **meublés touristiques**, but not all of them are equivalent to dwellings permanently withdrawn from the residential market. London and New York often publish **rooms** or **room nights**: rooms, not persons. In those cases, comparisons are presented as not fully homogeneous metrics or as scenarios with explicit assumptions.

Territory	Main demand source	Main capacity source	Critical unit
Catalonia	Overnight stays in tourist accommodation, Generalitat	Idescat: establishments and bed-places	Bed-places
City of Barcelona	Observatori del Turisme: tourists and overnight stays	Observatori: bed-places by modality	Bed-places
Rome	Roma Capitale: arrivals and presences	Comune di Roma: posti letto	Posti letto / bed-places
Paris	INSEE: hotel nights	Ville de Paris: registered meublés	Hotel nights and registrations, not always bed-places
London	GLA/ONS: visitor nights	GLA: rooms	Rooms
New York	NYC Tourism: hotel room nights sold	NYC Tourism: hotel rooms	Hotel rooms

5. Application to Catalonia and Barcelona

5.1. Catalonia, 2025

In 2025, 31.9 million tourists arrived in Catalonia and stayed in tourist accommodation, with 98.6 million overnight stays and an average length of stay of 3.09 nights. Based on overnight stays, TPE is calculated as follows:

TPE = 98,600,000 / 365 = 270,137 persons

The decomposed formula provides a check:

TPE = (31,900,000 x 3.09) / 365 = 270,058 persons

The difference of 79 equivalent persons is due to rounding in the published figures for tourists and average stay. The main calculation therefore uses the aggregate formula based on overnight stays.

Indicator	Value
Annual tourists	31,900,000
Overnight stays	98,600,000
Published average stay	3.09 nights
Aggregate TPE	270,137
Resident population	8,210,710
TPE / resident population	3.29%
Mean effective population	8,480,847
Tourist share in effective population	3.19%

Source: Generalitat de Catalunya, Dades d'afluència als allotjaments turístics de Catalunya. Any 2025; Idescat, population estimated at 1 January 2026.

The housing dimension shows a very different scale. Catalonia had **1,219,223 registered tourist bed-places** in 2025. Tourist-use dwellings amounted to **105,399 establishments** and contained **580,073 bed-places**, almost half of all registered tourist bed-places.

Modality	Bed-places	Share of total
Hotel establishments	331,853	27.22%
Campsites	267,507	21.94%
Rural tourism	23,002	1.89%
Tourist apartments	16,788	1.38%
Tourist-use dwellings	580,073	47.58%
Total	**1,219,223**	**100.00%**

Housing indicator	Value
Total tourist bed-places	1,219,223
TPE / tourist bed-places	22.16%
Tourist-use dwellings	105,399
Bed-places in TUD	580,073
Average bed-places per TUD	5.50
Total family dwellings	3,915,129
TUD / total dwellings	2.69%
Tourist bed-places / 100 dwellings	31.14
TUD bed-places / 100 dwellings	14.82

Source: Idescat, capacity of tourist accommodation 2025; Idescat, Population and Housing Census 2021.

5.2. City of Barcelona, 2025

The city of Barcelona presents an important methodological point. The Observatori del Turisme distinguishes between different tourism universes. To preserve maximum consistency, the main calculation is based on the universe of tourist accommodation with available data: **13,713,084 tourists** and **37,810,512 overnight stays**.

TPE = 37,810,512 / 365 = 103,590 persons

implicit average stay = 37,810,512 / 13,713,084 = 2.76 nights

Indicator	Value
Annual tourists used	13,713,084
Overnight stays used	37,810,512
Implicit average stay	2.76 nights
Strict TPE	103,590
Resident population	1,713,247
TPE / resident population	6.05%
Mean effective population	1,816,837
Tourist share in effective population	5.70%

Source: Observatori del Turisme a Barcelona, 2025 report; Idescat, municipal population of Barcelona 2025.

In housing terms, Barcelona had **156,009 tourist bed-places** in 2025. Of these, **61,875** were in tourist-use dwellings. Therefore, although TUD represented only **1.31%** of the total family housing stock, they concentrated **39.66%** of the city's entire tourism capacity.

Modality	Bed-places	Share of total
Hotels	76,689	49.16%

Modality	Bed-places	Share of total
Guest houses and hostels	6,202	3.98%
Tourist apartments	765	0.49%
Tourist-use dwellings	61,875 (10,632 dwellings)	39.66%
Hostels	10,478	6.72%
Campsites	0	0.00%
Rural tourism	0	0.00%
Total	**156,009**	**100.00%**

Housing indicator	Value
Total tourist bed-places	156,009
TPE / tourist bed-places	66.40%
Tourist-use dwellings	10,632
Bed-places in TUD	61,875
Average bed-places per TUD	5.82
Total family dwellings	808,751
TUD / total dwellings	1.31%
Tourist bed-places / 100 dwellings	19.29
TUD bed-places / 100 dwellings	7.65
TUD bed-places / total tourist bed-places	39.66%

Source: Observatori del Turisme a Barcelona, tourist bed-places by typology 2025; Idescat, Population and Housing Census 2021.

6. International extension

6.1. Rome

Rome is the most comparable international case with Barcelona, because municipal sources publish **arrivi**, **presenze** and **posti letto**. In 2024, Roma Capitale registered **22,205,163 arrivals** and **51,445,879 presenze**, equivalent to overnight stays.

TPE = 51,445,879 / 365 = 140,948 persons

average stay = 51,445,879 / 22,205,163 = 2.32 nights

Indicator	Rome 2024
Arrivals	22,205,163
Overnight stays / presenze	51,445,879

Indicator	Rome 2024
TPE	140,948
Resident population	2,747,290
TPE / resident population	5.13%
Mean effective population	2,888,238
Tourist bed-places / posti letto	185,871
TPE / tourist bed-places	75.83%
Total tourism structures	33,424
Alloggi per uso turistico	20,418
Alloggi per uso turistico + case vacanza	27,105

Source: Roma Capitale, Annuario statistico del turismo 2024; Comune di Roma, Turismo 2024; ISTAT, municipal population 2024.

Note: a ratio of tourist dwellings to total dwellings is not included for Rome because this review did not locate an official total housing figure for the Comune di Roma that is fully comparable with the Spanish or French census figures.

6.2. Paris

Paris requires distinguishing between hotel nights and registrations of **meublés de tourisme**. For Paris intra-muros, INSEE records **38.553 million hotel nights** in 2024. The hotel TPE is calculated as follows:

hotel TPE = 38,553,000 / 365 = 105,625 persons

This figure does not necessarily include all stays in tourist rentals, family homes or non-hotel accommodation. As an indicative scenario, a partial estimate of nights in **meublés touristiques** can be added, but it must be marked as an estimate and not as a fully closed official figure for the city.

estimated hotel + meublés TPE = (38,553,000 + 5,821,058) / 365 = 121,573 persons

Indicator	City of Paris 2024
Hotel nights	38,553,000
Hotel TPE	105,625
Resident population	2,084,894
Hotel TPE / resident population	5.07%
Estimated hotel + meublés TPE scenario	121,573
Broad scenario / resident population	5.83%
Total logements	1,399,122
Registered meublés de tourisme	95,344

Indicator	City of Paris 2024
Registered meublés / logements	6.81%
Meublés declared as main residence	78,301

Source: INSEE, hotel nights in Paris 2024; INSEE, population and logements; Ville de Paris, meublés de tourisme register 2024.

Note: the ratio of registered meublés to logements is not equivalent to permanent withdrawal from the residential market. The Ville de Paris indicates that more than 82% of registrations declared a main residence, and from 2025 the general tourist rental limit for a main residence was reduced to 90 days per year.

6.3. London

London publishes a very useful demand measure: **visitor nights**. The Greater London Authority indicates that total visitor nights in London reached approximately **154 million** in 2024. Therefore:

TPE = 154,000,000 / 365 = 421,918 persons

Indicator	London 2024/2025
Visitor nights 2024	154,000,000
TPE	421,918
Approx. resident population	9,100,000
TPE / resident population	4.64%
Total tourist rooms Q1 2025	286,000
Serviced accommodation rooms	174,000
Short-term rental rooms	112,000
Approx. homes	3,850,000
Tourist rooms / 100 homes	7.43

Source: Greater London Authority / London Datastore, A snapshot of tourist accommodation in London, 2025.

Note: in London, capacity is expressed in rooms, not bed-places. Therefore, TPE / tourist bed-places is not calculated as it is for Barcelona, Catalonia or Rome.

6.4. New York

New York is the least homogeneous case with Barcelona because the recent official source publishes **hotel room nights sold**, not person-nights. In 2025, NYC Tourism + Conventions reported **38.1 million room nights sold** and an inventory of approximately **124,000 hotel rooms**.

equivalent occupied hotel rooms = 38,100,000 / 365 = 104,384 rooms

To convert rooms into persons, an assumption on occupants per room must be introduced. The calculation must therefore be presented as a range:

Assumption	Estimated hotel TPE	Estimated TPE / population
1.5 persons per room	156,575	1.82%
1.7 persons per room	177,452	2.07%
2.0 persons per room	208,767	2.43%

Indicator	New York 2025
Annual visitors	65,000,000
Hotel room nights sold	38,100,000
Equivalent occupied rooms	104,384
Hotel inventory	124,000
Resident population	8,584,629
Housing units	3,737,632
Hotel rooms / 100 housing units	3.32

Source: NYC Tourism + Conventions, Annual Tourism Performance 2025; U.S. Census/ACS, population and housing units.

Note: a comparable short-term tourist dwelling indicator is not calculated because New York's regulatory framework, especially Local Law 18, severely restricts short-term residential tourist rental and alters comparability with Barcelona, Paris or Rome.

7. General comparison

The comparison must be read by homogeneous blocks. Catalonia, Barcelona and Rome allow TPE to be compared with bed-places or **posti letto**. Paris allows a solid comparison for hotel nights and a housing reading based on registrations of tourist **meublés**. London allows TPE through visitor nights but capacity in rooms. New York allows occupied rooms and person-per-room scenarios.

Territory	Year	Base	TPE / equiv.	Population	TPE/pop.
Catalonia	2025	Overnight stays in tourist accommodation	270,137	8,210,710	3.29%
Barcelona	2025	Overnight stays in tourist	103,590	1,713,247	6.05%

Territory	Year	Base	TPE / equiv.	Population	TPE/pop.
		accommodation			
Rome	2024	Total presenze	140,948	2,747,290	5.13%
Paris	2024	Hotel nights	105,625	2,084,894	5.07%
Paris, broad scenario	2024	Hotel + estimated meublés	121,573	2,084,894	5.83%
London	2024	Visitor nights	421,918	9,100,000	4.64%
New York	2025	Room nights x 1.7 p./room	177,452	8,584,629	2.07%

Territory	Main capacity	Housing indicator	Warning
Catalonia	1,219,223 tourist bed-places	31.14 bed-places / 100 dwellings	Data in bed-places: highly comparable internally.
Barcelona	156,009 tourist bed-places	19.29 bed-places / 100 dwellings	TUD are 1.31% of dwellings but 39.66% of tourist bed-places.
Rome	185,871 posti letto	Total housing pending	Comparable capacity in bed-places; housing ratio pending.
Paris	95,344 registered meublés	6.81% of logements	Many are main residences rented only partially.
London	286,000 tourist rooms	7.43 rooms / 100 homes	Rooms are not equivalent to bed-places.
New York	124,000 hotel rooms	3.32 hotel rooms / 100 housing units	Hotel rooms, not bed-places; residential STR not comparable.

The comparative reading suggests five conclusions. First, Barcelona, Rome and Paris fall within a similar range of average demographic tourism pressure: around 5-6% of resident population, with differences in statistical universe. Second, Catalonia has a higher absolute TPE than Barcelona, Rome or Paris, but its ratio to population is lower because of Catalonia's

demographic scale. Third, London stands out for the absolute magnitude of its TPE, above 420,000 equivalent persons, although its population ratio is more moderate. Fourth, New York requires translation from room nights into persons, so it should be presented as a range or scenario. Fifth, the housing dimension changes the interpretation: Paris has a large register of **meublés**; Barcelona has a relatively low municipal share of TUD, but those TUD represent an enormous fraction of its total tourism capacity.

8. Discussion: what the dual framework contributes

8.1. Avoiding the error of comparing flows with stocks

The first contribution of the framework is to clean up the statistical language. Annual tourists should not be compared directly with residents. TPE converts tourists and stays into an average stock unit comparable with population.

Thus, Barcelona should not be described only as a city of 1.7 million residents that receives millions of tourists. In the strict universe of tourist accommodation, it should be described as a city that incorporates around **103,590 average tourist persons**, equivalent to just over **6%** of its resident population.

8.2. Separating human presence from housing capture

The second contribution is to distinguish human presence from housing capture. A tourist dwelling may be empty for part of the year and still exert pressure on the residential market if it is outside ordinary residential use. TPE and housing capacity therefore answer different questions.

> TPE answers: how many tourist persons are present on average.
>
> K_T and V_TUD answer: how much space is oriented to tourist accommodation.

This distinction avoids false statistical reassurance. A low percentage of TUD over total dwellings may conceal a high participation of those TUD in tourism capacity, as occurs in Barcelona. Conversely, a large register of tourist dwellings may include many main residences rented only for a limited part of the year, as in Paris.

8.3. Seasonality as a second-level problem

Annual TPE is an average. But tourism is seasonal. Therefore, in a second version of the paper it would be useful to calculate monthly TPE:

> $TPE_m = N_m / d_m$

where **N_m** are the overnight stays in the month and **d_m** are the days of the month. This extension would allow annual TPE to be compared with the TPE of August, Easter, summer or major events.

9. Limits and future lines

The first limit is international comparability. Cities do not publish the same data or the same units. Barcelona, Catalonia and Rome allow work with bed-places; London and New York often use rooms; Paris combines hotel nights with registrations of **meublés**. The paper must therefore avoid simplistic rankings and explicitly state the statistical unit of each city.

The second limit is territorial. Municipal or regional indicators conceal neighbourhood concentrations. A figure of **1.31%** TUD over total dwellings in Barcelona may be low at municipal scale and, at the same time, represent an intense phenomenon in specific central neighbourhoods.

The third limit is temporal. Some housing data come from the 2021 census, while tourism data are from 2024 or 2025. A closed academic article would need to update all series or justify the use of structural data.

The fourth limit is non-overnight population. Day-trippers, cruise visitors without an overnight stay, event attendees and same-day visitors do not appear in TPE based on overnight stays. They can be incorporated through a time-equivalence:

> DTE = sum of day-tripper presence hours / (24 x 365)[5]

Finally, the framework may be expanded towards an Effective Territorial Equivalent Population (ETEP):[6]

> ETEP = PR + TPE + DTE + commuter population + temporary students + other temporary populations

This extension would allow the analysis to move from a theory of tourism to a general theory of the effective population load of contemporary cities.

10. Conclusion

Tourism must be measured simultaneously as population and as housing capacity. Tourist Population Equivalent translates an annual flow of overnight stays into an average present population. Tourist housing capacity measures the space structurally oriented to tourism.

In Catalonia, the 2025 TPE was **270,137 persons**, **3.29%** of the resident population. In the city of Barcelona, the strict TPE in tourist accommodation was **103,590 persons**, around **6.05%** of the resident population. But the housing dimension shows another layer: in Barcelona, TUD are only **1.31%** of the total family housing stock, yet they concentrate almost **40%** of the city's tourist bed-places.

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[5] **Day-Tripper Equivalent (DTE)** is an extension proposed here to convert same-day visitors into an annual equivalent population through hours of presence.

[6] **Effective Territorial Equivalent Population (ETEP)** is an extension proposed here to aggregate residents, tourist equivalents, day-tripper equivalents and other temporary populations into one effective territorial load indicator.

The central conclusion is that it is not enough to say how many tourists arrive. One must ask how many are present and how much space is organised to host them. The first question is demographic; the second is housing-based. Together, they allow a more precise theory of the tourist city.

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